

Medical provider Q&A
Coronavirus-19

How do we get accurate and current information on confirmed cases in Nebraska?

Go to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services website at <http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>. They update this site daily.

How do I get my questions answered by the GPHealth Hospital Incident Command Center?

Call 308.568.7187. Hospital Incident Command meets twice daily. If you need an immediate answer, please call the Administrator-on-Call (AOC).

Which of my patients should be tested for COVID-19?

Currently, the criteria for testing includes; fever, cough, shortness of breath, or fever and cough, or fever and shortness of breath. High priority patients to test include: pregnancy, patients who are immunocompromised, exposure to someone with confirmed COVID-19, a healthcare worker, a hospitalized ICU patient or a nursing home resident.

The recommendation is to obtain a respiratory panel first to rule out other respiratory viruses. If the panel is negative and symptoms or criteria indicate, you should request a COVID-19 test, the same swab can be used for the COVID-19 test.

It is critically important that staff responsible for collecting nasopharyngeal (NP) swabs be thoroughly trained and strictly compliant with specimen collection protocols. Failure to collect a proper specimen could result in a false negative test, which could have major consequences for controlling COVID-19. Please work with staff responsible for NP specimen collection to be sure they are thoroughly trained and compliant with specimen collection protocols. A training video can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hXohAo1d6tk>

How do I get my patients tested for COVID-19?

In order to accommodate the current and future needs of the situation, the state is limiting who can be tested. There is simply not enough supplies to test everyone. Nebraska Public Health Lab (NPHL) is currently only processing 60 tests per day and could increase to 100 tests per day if necessary. If a patient presents with a fever, cough, or shortness of breath, assume they have COVID-19, advise them to self-isolate, contact the local health department. In addition, advise them to contact those they have been in contact with to let them know that may have been exposed.

Until further notice:

If patient presents to the emergency department:

- Mask the patient immediately
- Place the patient in airborne precautions as soon as possible
- Assess the patient and determine if they meet criteria. Rule out other alternative diagnosis
- Call the West Central District Health Department (WCDHD) to get test approval at 308.520.0158

- WCDHD will approve or deny the test and sign a lab requisition form that will need to accompany the specimen
- The test takes approximately 24-72 hours depending on level of prioritization
- Advise the patient to self-isolate until test results are available
- WCDHD will call the physician and patient with results and further guidance

If patient is at an outpatient family practice clinic:

- Encourage all patients to call ahead if they are experiencing symptoms or suspect they have COVID-19
- If patient presents, put a mask on and place the patient in a negative pressure room if possible. If you do not have one, place the patient in a private room and shut the door. Try to get the patient seen as quickly as possible
- Assess the patient and determine if they meet criteria
- Call the West Central District Health Department (WCDHD) to get test approval at 308.520.0158
- If approval is given by WCDHD, they will direct you to send your patient for specimen collection at the local mobile testing site, which is now in operation Monday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. WCDHD will provide the location of the mobile testing site during your call for approval. **Patients will need approval from their physician and WCDHD to be at the mobile site.** This is not a walk-in testing site.
 - Another option is that the outpatient clinics could obtain specimen with the proper PPE including use of PAPR (all GPHealth clinics) or N95 mask (non-GPH clinics)
- The GPHealth laboratory will process specimen and send to the Nebraska Public Health Lab
- The test takes approximately 24-72 hours depending on level of prioritization
- Advise the patient to self-isolate until test results are available
- WCDHD will call the physician and patient with results and further guidance

If patient is an outpatient specialty clinic:

- Screen the patient for fever, cough, shortness of breath, travel to high risk areas, or exposure to a person with confirmed positive COVID-19
- Mask the patient if he or she screens positive
- Advise the patient that the appointment will need to be re-scheduled
- Request the patient self-isolate at home, and contact the local health department
- If the patient requires care, advise them to call ahead to notify the care provider of their symptoms or positive exposure or travel history

If the patient is an inpatient,

- Place the patient in airborne isolation
- Call West Central District Health Department (this must be a physician that calls). If you struggle to reach them, call Jenny Lantis at 308.568.7140 or the administrator on-call (308.530.4802)
- WCDHD will approve or deny the test
- The test takes approximately 24-72 hours depending on the level of prioritization
- WCDHD will call the physician with results and further guidance

PLEASE NOTE: As the COVID-19 situation evolves, information and instructions may change. What is recommended today may change. Please be prepared for new and different information as the situation rolls out.

What should I be telling my staff to tell our patients who are concerned they might have COVID-19?

It is recommended that clinic staff call patients prior to their scheduled appointments and confirm the patient is not experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, exposed to someone who is confirmed positive or traveled to a restricted area.

Clinics should be encouraging all patients to call ahead if they are concerned about exposure to COVID-19 or are experiencing a fever, cough and shortness of breath. Clinic staff should be reviewing the criteria questions with the patient. These include:

- Symptomatic: fever, cough, shortness of breath
- Traveled to a high risk area
- Exposed to someone who is confirmed COVID-19 positive

If the patient does not meet testing criteria, recommend that the patient self-isolate and self-report to WCDHD.

What precautions should my clinic staff be taking to protect themselves from the spread of COVID-19?

If a symptomatic patient comes in, mask the patient immediately. Implement contact (gown & gloves) and droplet (mask & goggles) precautions for any undiagnosed respiratory illness. If you obtain a specimen on a suspected COVID-19 patient, the person collecting the specimen should use a PAPR (all GPH clinics) or N95 (non-GPH clinics) to obtain the specimen. Practice all proper handwashing hygiene.

What do I do if a patient presents in my clinic asking to be tested for COVID-19 and doesn't call ahead?

Nebraska is in crisis mode for testing. Not everyone can be tested. West Central Public Health District is assessing the need for testing based on the above criteria and physician insight of the individual case. If they meet the above criteria, give them a mask and isolate the patient for testing.

Will the hospital and clinics have enough supplies to manage the COVID-19 event?

Great Plains Health has ordered as many supplies as needed for now and the foreseeable future. This week, FEMA authorized the release of the strategic national stockpile (SNS) that will infuse more medical supplies into Lincoln County. More information will be released in the coming days as to how the emergency supplies will be released to individual clinics.

Right now, PAPR units and hoods are limited, however, we do have a protective equipment plan in place. If PAPR supplies deplete, we have a plan in place for N95 use and other respiratory protection measures.

What will happen when we have a positive case of COVID-19 in Lincoln County?

A positive case will be announced by West Central District Health Department. If the patient requires hospital care, they will likely be sent to Omaha to the National Quarantine Unit or Biocontainment Unit.

Can someone be co-infected with rhinovirus and COVID-19?

Currently, evidence suggests this occurs in less than 2% of cases.

Is there a current algorithm for asymptomatic testing?

Again, Nebraska is in crisis mode for testing and we cannot test everyone. People who are asymptomatic do not require testing.

What is Great Plains Health doing to prepare and communicate during the COVID19 event?

- Safety huddle every morning
- HICS Command update twice per day
- CEO newsletter

- Community education on social media and website
- Calls with the Federal government
- Participation in the joint information center
- Limiting hospital inpatient visitors to symptom-free immediate family members only. Clinic visits are limited to patients and if the patient requires assistance, they may have one symptom-free visitor to assist.
- Stationing security at all entrances and screening with the CDC recommended criteria
- We will be setting up employee screening at employee entrances in the coming days
- Tele-health options currently being established for primary care, hospitalists, pediatrics and emergency medicine
- Holding tele-health outreach clinic visits where appropriate and deemed necessary
- Implemented business travel restrictions for all GPHealth employees for the next 30 days
- Having all employees report to employee health when they leave the community
- Cancelling all large meetings in the health system to encourage social distancing as much as possible
- GPHealth nutrition services has double ordered food supplies and restricted menus for patients and café. Physician lounge will not be stocked during the COVID-19 event

What is occurring as normal at this time?

- Clinic visits for non-compromised patients
- Consistent with other facilities across the state, continuing with elective procedures after patient has been screened
- The GPHealth billing department is open but we are asking people to pay online if at all possible through the MyChart website

How are we updating the community?

- Social media
- Website
- Expert interviews with local media

How are we communicating to medical staff COVID-19 updates?

- Emailed medical staff announcements
- Daily HICS update email beginning 3/17
- Medical staff update held 3/16
- Hard copies announcements delivered to clinics
- GPOnline
- CEO newsletter